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ABSTRACT

In 1988 the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Commission for Educational Quality produced a separate study of trends in population, education, and employment, looking ahead to the year 2000. The SREB Challenge 2000 goals have been the subject of detailed benchmark reports semi-annually since. This year, there are 12 reports in the Educational Benchmarks 2000 series. This paper turns attention back to the trends in discussing the following points: (1) What was thought in 1988 about the trends in the 12 years leading to 2000? (2) What actually happened as predicted and what did not? (3) How can the differences, accomplishments, and continuing challenges be explained? (4) Looking ahead to the year 2010-more of the same or some differences? and (5) Some thoughts for policymakers on thinking differently about goals for the future-What we know we can expect and what is less predictable? The SRE Trends report in 1988 predicted strong population growth-almost 15 percent to more than 92 million for the region by 2000. Population in the South did grow and it grew a lot faster than expected. Public-school enrollment also grew much faster than projected. Public-school enrollment growth is shifting presently from elementary grades to middle and high school grades. However, between 2005 and 2009, the SREB region in fact can expect a very slight decline of 0.3 percent. Only Georgia and Texas are showing any growth in school enrollment. Data are given for projected job growth by level of education required, in the United States between 1998 and 2008. (DFR)

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SREB

A Perspective –

Educational Goals and Changes

1988-2010

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SREB

A Perspective –

Educational Goals and Changes

1988-2010

Rick Edmonds

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This perspective on trends, past and future, is that of Rick Edmonds, staff director of the Business/ Higher Education Partnership, an advocacy group for Florida's higher education sector. Mr. Edmonds is a consultant and writer specializing in education policy who also served as co-director of the Governor's Commission on Education from 1996 to 1998. Edmonds was a journalist earlier in his career with the Philadelphia Inquirer and St. Petersburg Times. At the Times, he was editor and publisher of Florida Trend for nearly a decade and supervised the launch of Governing, an award-winning national magazine on state and local government. Mr. Edmonds' professional interest in education is also personal as he and his wife Marianne have two school-aged children.

A Perspective –
Educational Goals and Changes
1988-2010

"The future is now," inspirational speakers like to say. This short paper takes a somewhat literal version of that saying as its jumping off point. Here is how.

In 1988, a distinguished group of Southerners framed *Goals for Education: Challenge 2000* for SREB. The group, officially known as the SREB Commission for Educational Quality, produced a separate study of trends in population, education and employment, looking ahead to the year 2000. One study informed the other, especially in the notion that it would be "unacceptable" to let nature take its course allowing many in the South to be unprepared educationally for the higher skill jobs of the year 2000.

The SREB *Challenge 2000* goals have been the subject of detailed "benchmark" reports semi-annually since. This year, there are twelve reports in the *Educational Benchmarks 2000* series. This paper turns attention back to the trends in five sections that follow:

- What we thought in 1988 about the trends in the 12 years leading to 2000.
- What actually happened as predicted and what did not.
- Some comments on the differences — how to explain them, accomplishments and continuing challenges.
- Looking ahead to the year 2010 — more of the same or some differences?
- Some thoughts for policy makers on thinking differently about goals for the future — what we know we can expect and what is less predictable.

What we thought in 1988

The SREB *Trends* report in 1988 predicted strong population growth — almost 15 percent to more than 92 million for the region by 2000 — but with noteworthy variations. Hispanic population would grow the fastest, non-white faster than white. There would be increases in working-age and retirement-age populations, less in the school-age and a dip in the traditional college-age group. The highest percentage growth would be in the two biggest states, Florida and Texas. Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina and Maryland would also grow faster than the national average; other states in the region would grow more slowly than the rest of the nation.

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Public school enrollment, tracking the projections above, was expected to grow just under 10 percent for the region between 1985 and 2000. College enrollment was expected to decline by 300,000 students over the period — or stay even if the participation rates could be increased 10 percent. The lagging participation and completion rate of black and Hispanic students (at the same time these groups were growing as a percentage of population) was a concern. The report projected that the South would continue to increase the percentage of its adult population completing high school (to 81 percent) and college (24 percent), but would still slightly trail national averages.

In employment, the *Trends* report predicted a 26.3 percent increase — 10.6 million new jobs — between 1986 and 2000. The great proportion of that increase was expected in the services, sales and clerical categories. The report also saw sharp declines in the number of farm and low-skill manufacturing jobs. The report cited an influential Hudson Institute study predicting that women, and especially minorities, would make up the lion's share of new workers entering the labor force during the period. And, it concluded with a discussion of a potential bad-case scenario. What if the South reached the year 2000 with a shortfall of people educationally qualified for the more demanding jobs coming into being? Perhaps not all of those 10.6 million jobs would materialize. Unemployment could rise. Economic activity could shift nationally or internationally. State and local revenues could lag. Thus, the related *Goals for Education* report recommended its ambitious package of linked improvements, in part, as economic necessity.

What actually happened

Population in the South did grow — and a lot faster than expected. It reached 96 million by 2000. As a recent SREB report highlighted, practically all of the nation's net growth by domestic in-migration is in the South. The *Trends* report was closer to right on the variations — the fast percentage growth in Hispanic population particularly. Traditional college-age adults did fall slightly as a percentage of the region's population. Georgia actually outpaced Florida and Texas in percentage population growth in the 90s; Tennessee and North Carolina exceeded expectations. But another part of the region grew at about the national average and a couple of states (Louisiana and West Virginia) showed slow growth.

Public school enrollment also grew much faster than the *Trends* report had projected. It had reached 16.6 million by fall of 1998, compared to the *Trends* estimate of 15.3 million by 2000. That is 10 percent more than anticipated — 1.3 million extra students, requiring tens of thousands more teachers and classrooms in the SREB states than had been expected. And, despite the soft demographic in the college-age group, college enrollment did not decline as had been predicted; it actually increased 25 percent between 1986 and 1996, (That is a striking difference discussed in more detail below.) Neither the SREB region nor the nation increased the high school completion rate among adults as much as the *Trends* report had suggested. The gap between the region and the national average persists, but had narrowed to three percentage points by 1998. College completion rates for both the SREB region and nation fell somewhat below the 1988 estimates as well.

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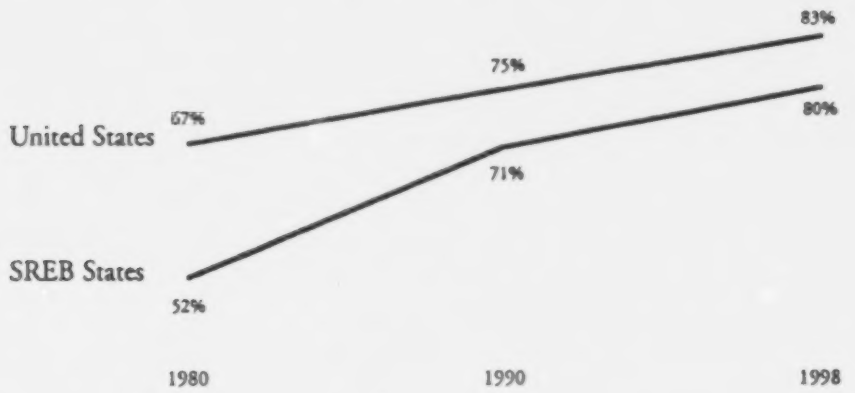
Figure 1
Percent of adults who have completed high school



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

The *Trends* report projected creation of 10.6 million jobs, a 26 percent increase for the region, from 1986 to 2000. There was an actual increase of 26 percent in non-agricultural employment in just the 10 years between 1989 and 1999. So, as a job engine too, the South is running ahead of projections. Indeed job growth has been concentrated in services with agriculture and manufacturing dwindling. Construction, however, shows gains rather than losses. A scenario in which the SREB region declines or underperforms because of educational shortfalls has clearly not materialized.

Relevant differences — unforeseen trends and accomplishments

On balance our 1988 colleagues rate good marks as seers. But that is not the point. We underscore some of the differences in what actually happened — especially the larger variances — in the interest of picking up some ways in which the last decade departed from a predictable path. And at least a couple of the variations point to real accomplishments in some of the areas of educational attainment SREB policy makers targeted in 1988.

Greater growth — especially greater job growth — both in the region and the nation has some fairly obvious explanations. We could not have anticipated a decade of unbroken prosperity following the 1989-91 recession. We would not have imagined the pace and sustained kick of computer technology and information-age business. A queasiness about national and regional competitiveness in the late 1980s has largely faded — these boom

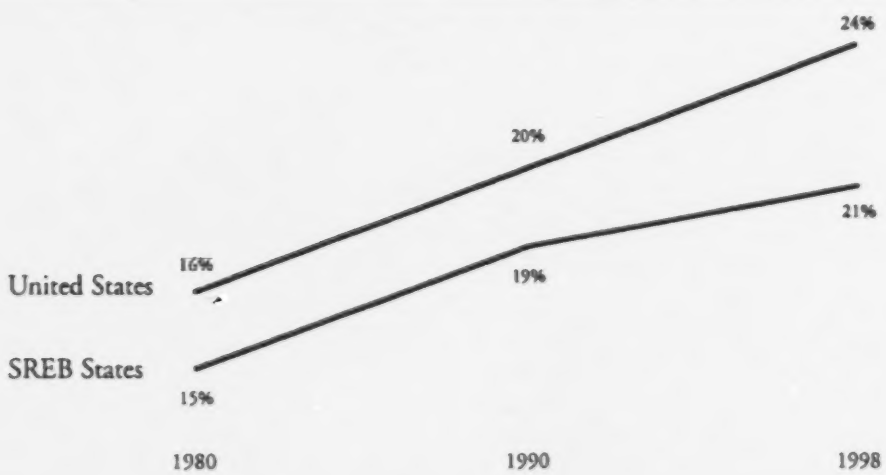
years for the U.S. have been much more mixed for international competitors, especially nations in the Far East.

But these obvious explanations don't get at the particular dynamism of the SREB region. Hardly the national capital of high-tech enterprises, the South outstrips the nation's other regions in population and job growth. How so? The numbers above are at least suggestive. Both as a place to live and a job magnet, the South is attractive. We can hypothesize that nontraditional workers — women, retirees, the disabled — continued through the 90s to increase their participation in the work force (various studies suggest that). We might also guess that the South attracted workers from elsewhere in the United States and immigrants, both legal and undocumented, in especially large numbers for low- and mid-wage jobs.

This would explain an apparent paradox in the education statistics of the last decade. College enrollment and degree completion increased; but the region's percentage of adults completing college is flat to slightly declining. That suggests a big addition of less-educated adults to fill labor needs in a tight market. Adding less-educated adults (excuse the flavor of an excuse here) would also explain slowing progress on increasing the percentage of high school and college graduates in the adult population, as was true in both the region and the nation.

Why, by the way, was college enrollment in the 1990s so much greater than had been anticipated? Since the number of 18 to 24 year-olds declined, the answer must lie in greater rates of participation, especially among adults a bit past traditional college-age. The

Figure 2
Percent of adults who have a four-year college degree



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

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numbers suggest (as does a recent Public Agenda survey) that more and more citizens buy into the belief that a college education is essential to good future earnings prospects. The unexpected surge in college attendance does raise an interesting question for policy makers going forward: Should they plan for continuation of that rate of growth in the coming decade or have increases in the rate of partici pation topped out?

With what we know of the potent economy of the 1990s, it would be a stretch to argue that the South has prospered mainly by meeting the SREB *Challenge 2000* education goals. However, let's credit educational progress with a solid supporting role. As SREB President Mark Musick has written, none of the goals has been completely met, but there has been progress on nearly all of them, often substantial progress. The details are spelled out in other papers in the *Educational Benchmarks 2000* series, but consider a few steps forward of particular note:

- The South is a leader in programs getting a higher percentage of young children ready to start school (and in measuring progress toward that goal). Remember, in 1988 kindergarten was not yet universal in the SREB region.
- Educational achievement still lags national averages, but has improved some as measured on the National Assessment of Educational Progress scores. Texas and North Carolina offer two of the most dramatic cases of improvement against a national standard.
- SREB states are ahead of the rest of the nation in increasing the percentage of high school students taking a full college-prep schedule of courses — a change that benefits the competencies of vocational education students as well.
- The South, starting with proportionately more dropouts than the rest of the nation, reduced its dropout rate faster than the nation and is doing more to improve its record of keeping children in school.

The trends analysis contained in this paper suggests one more educational achievement of particular note: Minority participation in higher education, while still trailing that of whites in the region, has improved dramatically from the mid-1980s.

In 1986, African-Americans represented 13.2 percent of college enrollment in SREB states. That was actually a decline from 14.6 percent in 1976. The 1988 *Trends* report estimated that the percentage would likely stay flat through 2000, but could increase to 14.6 percent if the going-to-college rate among African-Americans increased by 10 percent. In fact, by 1996 (the most recent year for which reliable data are available) the percentage of black enrollment had risen to 16.3 — far exceeding even the more optimistic of the predicted scenarios.

Similarly, the percentage of Hispanic college enrollment for the region (largely concentrated in Florida and Texas) increased from 5.2 percent in 1986 to 7.6 percent in 1996. African-Americans and Hispanics are also completing high school and college at better rates than in 1986, though the gap between these groups and the rest of the population remains large. (The number of bachelor's degrees awarded African-Americans in SREB states increased 66 percent between 1986 and 1996; to Hispanics, nearly 50 percent.)

Some policy discussions of this topic begin with the observation (still true) that minority populations go on to college at a lower rate at a time when their percentage among the population, especially among new workers, is increasing. What is hidden is just how much better SREB states are doing now than before in including minorities in the college population. The states have made some long strides in the necessary direction of serving the racial and ethnic mix that is here now and coming in the future rather than the one that used to be.

Looking ahead to 2010

Given the mixed record of hits and misses in 1988, it is prudent to offer a more modest and less precise bundle of forecasts this time around. We do have some solid numbers on probable population increases and public school enrollment growth. As for job growth, the standard industrial classifications of yore are not much of a match to a service-oriented, information-age economy. We will refer instead to the 10-year job forecast the Bureau of Labor Statistics is offering, though those numbers are not available by state or region.

With those qualifications, there are items of interest in a scan of the future and foreseeable differences in the decade ahead from the last 10 or 12 years.

Population growth will continue strong in SREB states, but is projected at a somewhat slower rate in percentage terms than the immediate past. Our growth is projected to continue faster than the nation's, and it may be relevant that recent estimates have been on the low side.

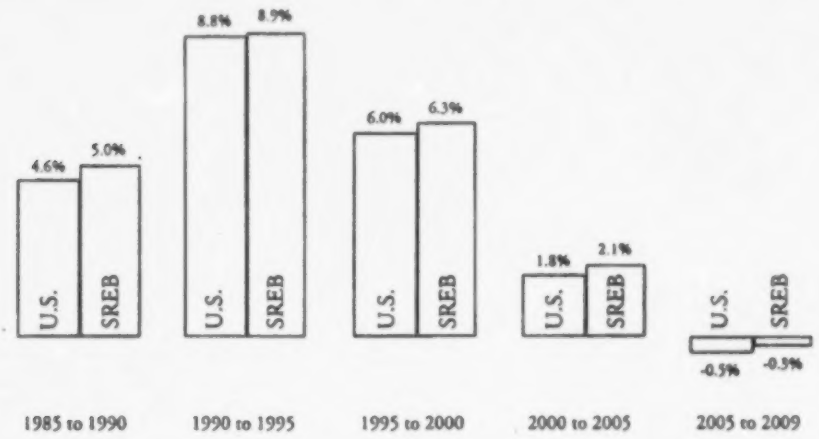
Demographically, we are entering the retirement years of the Depression/World War II babies, and the school years of the so-called "baby-bust echo" cohort. Neither school-age nor college-age groups will increase much overall by 2010. Retirement-age population continues to rise some and the working-age group shows a healthy increase. Within the region, Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee have joined Florida and Texas as fast-growth states; the latter two are expected to slow their pace some in the 2000s compared to that of the last 15 years.

The racial dynamic of recent years — African-American population up some, Hispanic share of population growing quickly — continues in an unbroken line.

Public-school enrollment growth is shifting right now from elementary grades to middle and high school grades. It continues somewhat faster in the SREB region (8 percent in the years 1995 to 2005) than in the nation (7 percent). The current period, however, is not quite so daunting in pace as the previous 10 years (the SREB region had a 14.3 percent enrollment growth, 1985 to 1995). We don't want to make too much of a slowing growth-rate — that still translates into adding 71,000 more children in SREB states in each of the next several years who need classrooms and qualified teachers.

However, mid-decade the school enrollment line takes a hairpin turn. After all these years of very rapid to fairly rapid growth, school enrollment turns abruptly to zero growth. For the five years 2005 to 2009, the SREB region in fact can expect a very slight decline of 0.3 percent. The state-by-state figures are of interest. Only Georgia and Texas are showing any growth in school enrollment. All the states fall

Figure 3
Changes in elementary and secondary school enrollment



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

within a narrow range of 2 percent to -2 percent. That is in marked contrast to the wide swings among SREB states in the 10-year period (1995-2005). Georgia and Texas are increasing enrollment 18 and 16 percent, respectively in that period, while five states (West Virginia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Kentucky) are losing enrollment. So mid-decade, the SREB region changes from a mix of fast growth and no growth states to one where enrollment flattens for all.

High-school graduates are growing quickly in numbers through 2005; hence, so is the pool of traditional college-age entrants. That is true for several SREB states — Maryland, Delaware and Virginia — whose overall population growth is more modest. And in SREB states, each year that pool has a slightly larger percentage of minorities. By 2010, several of the SREB states will approach or reach majority-minority status in their high-school graduates as Texas and Mississippi have already in public school enrollment.

Private schools' share of high-school graduates, after years of holding steady in SREB states at around 9 percent of public schools' (two percentage points below the national average) is expected to rise to 12 percent, just above the national average, by 2005.

Turning to employment and labor force statistics, we find confirmation of some long-observed trends. Agricultural employment is only 2 percent of all jobs. The number of manufacturing jobs — 6.1 million of 44.6 million in the SREB region in 1999 — is more significant. But for the decade from 1989 to 1999, that represents no growth in absolute numbers and a two percentage point decline in share of jobs. There are some significant variations among SREB states in their dependence on

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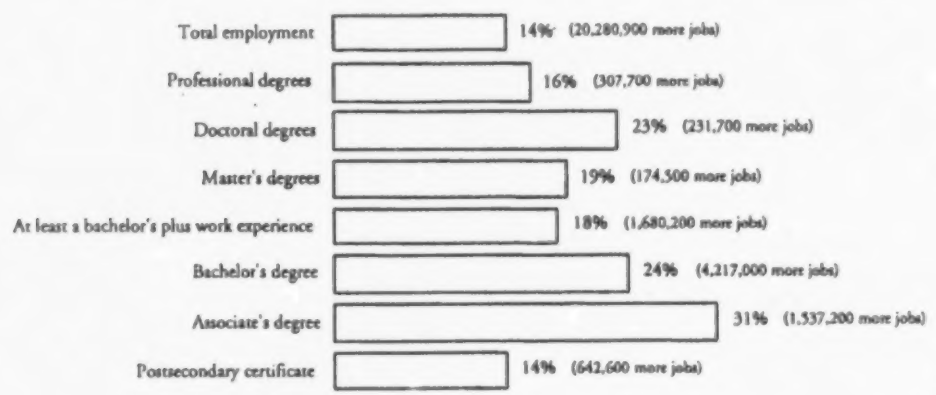
manufacturing — some like North Carolina and Arkansas are well above the regional and national norm while others (Florida and Maryland) have only 7 percent of workers in manufacturing, compared to 14 percent for the SREB region. Forecasts are for more of the same the next 10 years — a flat number and declining share of jobs in manufacturing.

So it is true that there are few jobs anymore down on the farm and no job growth in the mills or other traditional manufacturing enterprises. But that falls in the category of old news. Where are the new jobs likely to be? What level of educational attainment are they likely to require?

The latest national answers to those questions are developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The predictions, as many essayists on the subject observe, carry a somewhat ambiguous message. The fast-growth occupations from 1998 to 2008 are led by such categories as computer scientists (up 118 percent) and computer engineers (up 108 percent). But that growth is on a small base. Add those two categories together, and there will be more actual new jobs in such categories as retail salesperson, cashier and health aide.

To look at the matter another way, higher education still looks like a good bet from the point of view of the individual or state policy maker. All categories of jobs requiring a college degree are projected to grow at a faster pace than total employment in the years 1998 to 2008. As community college advocates often note, jobs requiring an associate's degree (typically two years and skill-specific) are the fastest

Figure 4
Projected job growth by level of education required, United States, 1998 to 2008



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

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growing group of all, 31 percent over the 10 years. Again, though, that is faster growth on a smaller base — jobs requiring a bachelor's degree are expected to number about 782,000 per year compared to 242,000 for associate's degree holders.

Thoughts about thinking differently during the 2000s

It is not the purpose of this paper to recommend renewing, refining or starting over on the 12 SREB *Challenge 2000* goals. That is for the SREB board and policy makers state-by-state to consider and decide.

But from the perspective of an outsider (whose desk is stacked high with education reform documents and who has written a couple), a general observation then some specific ones. The SREB *Challenge 2000* report holds up very well after a dozen years. It is particularly strong (where a great many falter) in being comprehensive and coherent. The whole span of pre-K through post-graduate is considered in linked fashion. And some often overlooked dimensions of the total education picture — like the vocational education track and adult literacy — get due consideration. Most of the goals were framed very specifically and early *Challenge 2000* documents make a case to skeptics for the value of benchmarking. The state of that art has advanced through the years. The *Educational Benchmarks 2000* series typically offer a half-dozen different ways a state might choose to measure progress. And there are enlightening specific examples. If South Carolina knows with some exactness how much it has increased readiness to begin first grade, how many other SREB states can say the same?

Historically the SREB *Challenge 2000* report just preceded the similar National Goals project and (according to the recent update report of that panel) substantially influenced it. It is also of some interest that the *Challenge 2000* chairman, former South Carolina Governor Richard Riley, has spent eight of the following 12 years as U.S. Secretary of Education.

All this and considerably more would argue against tossing aside the 12 goals and starting over. That said, the experience of the last decade or so and prospects for the coming one may provide stimulus for thinking differently about educational goals. What may be worth changing? A package of brief thoughts follows, some of them quite speculative:

1. Has the South versus the national average comparison, a staple of SREB *Challenge 2000* and a host of earlier reports, nearly run its course? Nearly all the relevant gaps — dropout rates, educational attainment, achievement scores — are narrowing. These days the South is more economic engine than economic problem child. And through the efforts of SREB and individual states, the region sets a fast pace of education reform (as noted by the New York Times in a front-page article this April.)

   As a statistical matter, the South is approaching 40 percent of national population. So, each improvement on a given indicator concurrently drives up the national average. If the gap comparisons remain relevant, they might be more forcefully stated as the SREB states versus the average for the rest of the nation. But some policy makers may now reasonably prefer

to set goals by comparison to peer states within and outside the South (leave Maine and Iowa aside) or to make sure all of the relevant trends in their own state head upward.

2. How the SREB region does educationally with its minority and economically disadvantaged populations and those for whom English is not a first language remains highly relevant in the decade ahead. These groups will continue to be a growing share of population and public school enrollment, as they have been in the decade just finished. There is good progress noted above in inclusion of these groups in higher education, which is no cause for complacency; more will be needed. SREB states, led by Texas, have gotten realistic and precise in insisting that successful schools are ones that improve the performance of all the subgroups they serve, not just improve overall. If we are at the end of the affirmative action and court-ordered desegregation era, will policy makers find new approaches that drive results in the right directions for these groups? Immigrants have been filling some of the jobs at the low-wage end of the spectrum in this decade of boom growth. That broadens the challenge of adult literacy for them and successful schooling of their children — broadens the challenge geographically beyond Florida and Texas.

3. The potential competitiveness crisis, laid out in the final pages of the 1988 *Trends* report, did not happen. Looking back one can see reasons why not. A hot economy provided job opportunities across the wage and education spectrum (helping to make welfare-to-work at least a limited success). Also, as Governor Roy Barnes of Georgia recently observed, there's nothing wrong with importing smart, well-educated workers from other states as needed. Looking back, one might conclude that the 1988 report viewed perceived education gaps, strong international competition from the Far East and the mixed economic performance of that decade with undue alarm.

   But, one might argue, now is a time for reexamining the education-economy link rather than merely relaxing about it. What strategic strengthening of education systems will boost state economies, and how? Do we have a firm understanding of why the SREB states grew as they did in population and jobs? In light of that performance is the issue going forward better framed as sustaining momentum and balance than "catching up?" Chances are that any such exercise will identify education and educational improvements as being just as or more important in the decade ahead as in the decade just finished, but the detail of how could be suggestive.

4. In the same vein, we noted earlier that the disappearance of farming jobs and flattening of the manufacturing sector is perfectly real, but also old news. And except to say that most of the growth is in services, we have a fairly fuzzy grip on where the job growth is coming now and next. Old labor statistics haven't caught up with the new economy. The available projections still indicate that more education is a good thing for an individual and that higher percentages of high school or college graduates are a good thing for a state. But perhaps some categories within the whole are especially important — say, a nimbleness in the job-specific associate's-degree training or special attention to advanced techni-

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cal degrees and job-generating clusters of university research. Pardon the flavor of the obvious but this seems a particularly good time for a state's education policy makers to be in communication with economic development strategists. The same could be said of SREB and the several groups with a focus on the South's economy.

5. Information technology is a wild card in lots of ways. As discussed above, it certainly means something for the job mix of the future, but just what is not so clear. The best estimates in the near-run seem to be for fast growth but on a small base. The game-boy generation would seem to have a leg up on older workers for new economy jobs. That suggests both a heightened importance of retraining for the old and some rethinking of what education, at various levels, adds to the established competencies of the computer-literate young.

   A separate set of technology questions bears on the delivery of education services. Distance learning is already a presence in higher education. SREB and individual states are working on the balance of participation in the advantages of the new while maintaining university systems that are state-run and geographically based. The rapid growth (3500 courses available from over 275 cooperating institutions within two years) of the SREB *Electronic Campus* illustrates that demand and accessibility of such college courses is here already. The hard part, on which the SREB model is doing better than several other such efforts elsewhere, is getting right such tricky details as quality assurance, transfer requirements and pricing.

   Florida, Kentucky and other states are beginning to experiment with the concept of an "online high school" that could be relevant to young people who have dropped out of school or working adults seeking a high school degree. The for-profit sector, accredited and non-accredited, has jumped on distance learning and is a growing presence in education. The computer companies themselves sell a lot of training in computer-specific competencies. Maybe the time has come when the role of these others needs to be factored into what states plan to provide.

6. Returning to more mundane educational planning issues, the SREB states currently divide between growth haves and have-nots. Whether this implies there should be two different strategies or two variations on a basic regional strategy is less clear. The growth states have the added financial pressure of providing classrooms and teachers for each year's enrollment burst. On the other hand, they have more of a growing tax base to handle the added expense. In any case, as the separate SREB report on achievement notes, a number of Southern states have been able, commendably, to combine coping with growth with concurrent quality gains. As a political dynamic, the necessary focus on education may help both ways. On the other hand, the many comments in this paper on the growth may ring a little hollow in states like West Virginia and Louisiana where enrollments have been flat and declining. Such states may be seeking a quality and range of education opportunities that will keep more young people in state and lay the human capital base for growth that hasn't come so easily.

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7. Demographically, do policy makers have a sharp focus in the marked shift in enrollment growth from elementary-age to middle- and secondary-age school population? At a bricks-and-mortar level school districts have been trapped before, let's hope not again, with the wrong buildings for shifting school populations. It's tough to put chemistry labs in what used to be third-grade classrooms. Teacher supply could be a challenge too, particularly given that those who prepare for teaching careers have been disproportionately opting for specialization in elementary grades. Also, since policy attention often follows population bubbles, one might suppose we are soon in for heightened attention to the strengths and failures of middle schools and high schools. If so, SREB is clearly ahead of the curve with its *High Schools That Work* and *Middle Grades Initiative*. That matches a body-of-thought in the education literature that our much-improved elementary schools and improving early childhood programs only pay off if effectively followed through in the middle and high school grades (where United States performance appears to slide in international achievement comparisons).

   If the enrollment projections discussed previously prove true, all SREB states will be faced with a period of flat enrollment starting in 2005. Ideally, that ought to be an occasion to invest in quality in ways worth a little advance planning. Conversely, the change to flat enrollment could be a shock to the system in places like Georgia, Florida and Texas where fast growth has been a given for quite a while.

8. Our topic in this paper has been trends in population, enrollment, educational attainment and the labor force. But we will stray a little to say that any look forward at the *Challenge 2000* goals needs to take account of how serious SREB states (along with the rest of the nation) became about standards over the last decade. A good thing, to be sure, but tougher standards bring their own set of complications — issues policy makers may wish to watch for, or new parameters to measure. For example, tougher promotion and graduation policies almost certainly have a potential to push out some students (especially awkward in a period of a secondary school demographic bubble). A universal algebra requirement makes all sorts of sense, and SREB states are leading the way nationally. But, as SREB president Mark Musick has noted, beware the "pound of coffee" problem. (That is, the "pound of coffee" you bring home from the store these days typically has 11 to 13 ounces, a fairly precise analogy since the manufacturers cut the content rather than raise the price.) Watered-down algebra courses are not the only issue — the commendable increases in college participation carry some of the same caution: Now, more than ever, we need measures of quality, as well as tracking the numbers and percentages of students completing various degrees and courses.

9. The unexpected 1990s surge in college enrollment and high public expectations of the earning power of a college degree are noteworthy and healthy. Could we conceivably follow this trajectory to an eventual oversupply of college graduates? On balance, the available evidence suggests maybe someday, but not yet.

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10. In general, is it time for new concepts, new things to measure, even a few entirely new goals to supplement the current 12? SREB *Challenge 2000* was arguably a little ahead of its time putting school readiness at the head of its list. And that goal can reasonably be updated and supplemented with the current focus on pre-school participation. On the other hand, the final of the goals, seeking a steady or increasing portion of state tax dollars to education, doesn't hold up as gracefully, given the welfare and Medicaid obligations inescapably laid on states during the 1990s. Is there now a different formulation to capture the objective of financial adequacy? Or, perhaps, is a decade-out objective for sustaining and maturing the standards movement or modernizing education services to the burgeoning information age, the stuff of a worthy new goal? We close by leaving such questions to the ingenuity of policy makers, who are more intimately acquainted with policy, and thank them for coming along for this tour of the available trends information.

Conclusion

Demographer Harold Hodgkinson likes to say of his brand of futurology, little children grow up — you can pretty much count on it. In that spirit, the one among these predictions that readers can underscore as a nearly sure thing is that our recent growth in enrollment in the elementary grades is shifting to upper grades. And that net enrollment increases will stop altogether in the last half of this decade. (Of course that assumes no new surges of in-migration to SREB states, which may not be a sure thing.)

SREB *Benchmarks* reports, this year and previous editions, often take the form of progress noted, but more progress needed. Perhaps we were not paying close enough attention, but the surge in minority college enrollment and degrees seems to fall in that category. The growth over the last decade has been significant and well beyond expectations. But with an even larger group of high school graduates expected this coming decade and a steadily increasing percentage of them minorities, it is no time for state policy makers to take their foot off the gas in increasing inclusion and completion rates.

Finally, an exercise like this one is inevitably a mix of reasonably informed speculation, extrapolation of the recent past and best guesses. Like other decades, the 2000s will no doubt have surprises we just don't imagine. If some of the unpredictable turns out to be less pleasant than the good-news 1990s, it is our conviction that steady attention to educational quality, pre-K through post-graduate, in SREB states will be good preparation for whatever comes.

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